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1963/04/10

452. Summary Record of the 511th National Security Council Meeting

Washington, April 10, 1963, noon.

Mr. McCone read a summary of current intelligence on Laos,[1] noting that we were dependent almost entirely for information from Kong Le sources. Therefore, we should take the information he had summarized with some caution.

Under Secretary Harriman was asked by Acting Secretary Ball to present the State Department's recommendations.[2]

Mr. Harriman said he agreed with the analysis which Mr. McCone had presented. He noted that the Pathet Lao forces had been unsuccessful so far in undermining the Kong Le neutralist forces.

In an effort to bring to an end the hostilities in the Plaines des Jarres and to maintain Kong Le's position, Mr. Harriman recommended that we:

a. Continue to supply Kong Le forces in the Plaines and Meo tribesmen in the area surrounding the Plaines.
b. Encourage the British to put pressure on the Soviet Union in the hope that the Russian Ambassador in Vientiane will tell the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao to stop the attacks on neutralist forces.
c. Put pressure on the French to take a firmer stand, including instructing their military mission in the area to support Kong Le and Phoumi forces.
d. Continue detailed planning for the reintroduction of U.S. military forces into Thailand if it is decided to so act in the future.
e. Consider whether at a later time we should openly use Phoumi forces.

Mr. Harriman reported that the ICC would be visiting the Plaines today and apparently will take further action to halt the fighting. Secretary Rusk, from Paris, recommended that we ask the King of Laos to commit his prestige in an effort to halt the Pathet Lao attacks on neutralists.[3] Mr. Harriman said the King was a very weak reed and probably would not be useful in this situation.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, NSC Meetings, 1963, No. 511, April 10, 1963. Top Secret. The meeting, which took place in the Cabinet Room of the White House, lasted until 12:50 p.m. (Ibid., President's Appointment Book)

[1] McCone's briefing is described in his memorandum for the record of the meeting, April 10. (Central Intelligence Agency, DCI-McCone Files, [*text not declassified*] 1 April–30 June 1963)

[2] Document 451.

[3] See Document 450.

A proposed draft letter to Khrushchev on Laos[4] was not presented to the President for consideration because of developments which indicated that fighting might be now under control.

The President indicated his support of the actions recommended by Mr. Harriman.[5] He commented on the fact that the ICC would be visiting the Plaines des Jarres and that supplies were getting through to Kong Le forces. He asked Admiral Anderson for the details of these U.S. shipments. Admiral Anderson listed the ammunition, supplies, and food which had been flown in to Kong Le forces in the past few days.

Mr. Harriman recommended that the discussion of Vietnam be omitted in view of recent developments which indicated that the problem discussed in the State paper was not as urgent as had appeared earlier.

Bromley Smith[6]

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[4] The draft letter to Khrushchev has not been found, but in an April 11 letter to Khrushchev on other topics—the nuclear test ban treaty, nuclear proliferation, Cuba—Kennedy raised Laos as follows:

"Another area in which there has been a flare-up of danger in recent days is Laos. My representatives will be in touch with yours on this problem, and I am sure that we both have a clear interest in preventing the breakdown of the agreement worked out so carefully last year. We continue to put great reliance on your own pledge of support for a neutral and independent Laos. Neither of us can wish for a direct test of force in that remote country, and in this instance it appears that the provocation has come from a side in which your influence can be more effective than ours." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Countries Series, USSR, Khrushchev Correspondence, Vol. IV–A, 1/4/63–4/11/63) The full texts of all the Kennedy–Khrushchev correspondence, including this April 11 letter, is printed in volume VI.

[5] NSC Action No. 2464 reads as follows:

"Discussed the situation in the Plaine des Jarres; noted the President's approval of several recommendations aimed at assisting Kong Le's neutralist forces to withstand Pathet Lao attacks and bringing the fighting in the area to an end." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, NSC Meetings, 1963, No. 511, April 10, 1963)

[6] Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.